

Dek Unu Magazine

Solo Exhibitions of Fine
Photoart Portfolios

March, 2018

Featured Artist

Peter van Stralen

"Odd Bodies"

Cover Image:p216D
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Artist Interview - Peter van Stralen

Wow, Peter! These poses are incredible! Tell us how you work together with your models to develop such creative results.

My collaboration with dancers started a long time ago. I was fascinated by these young women because they have the ability to combine power with grace in a very natural way. They are my muses; with their efforts and their enthusiasm they help me to produce these images. So, these images are not just my images but also our images.

A photoshoot usually starts with a few rather embryonic ideas in my head and we take it from there. Some of these embryonic ideas turn out to be completely useless, mostly because they are anatomically impossible to realize - even for professional dancers. But other ideas are workable; so, by trial and error we move forward until these ideas get their final shape. This process is the best part of all. At times, we laugh a lot during each photoshoot, because this is playing, just like children do. The great pianist Arthur Rubenstein once said, "You should play the piano as if you are whistling a tune." That is how I feel about my work.

Some poses could easily be flowing dance moves. Do you use music? Others are complicated constructions that must take a long time to perfect. An ordeal for your models?

Yes, some of the poses may seem to be an ordeal for the models. But then again, these are dancers and dancers love a challenge. They like to push the boundaries of their bodies and to get to know their bodies even better during a photoshoot. So sometimes they even encourage me to continue, just when I am about to give up, feeling a bit sorry for them.

I enjoy listening to music when I am working, but only as a background sound to get into the right atmosphere. I never use it as a tool to create the poses themselves.

Your models are all anonymous. Is there a reason why?

There are two reasons for this. First of all, if I were to add a face to my image, the image would become personalized. Viewers might say, "Wow, she has great eyes," or, "Hey look, there's Judy, Nancy, Mary ..." et cetera, and I don't want that. I want the viewer to focus on the body forms, without getting distracted by a face. The human face has such a strong attraction that I have to omit it to make people concentrate on the body. I'd like to think of myself as a kind of two-dimensional sculptor who loves these women. Not just because they can be beautiful and sexy, but also because they are strong, versatile and basically a mystery to me.

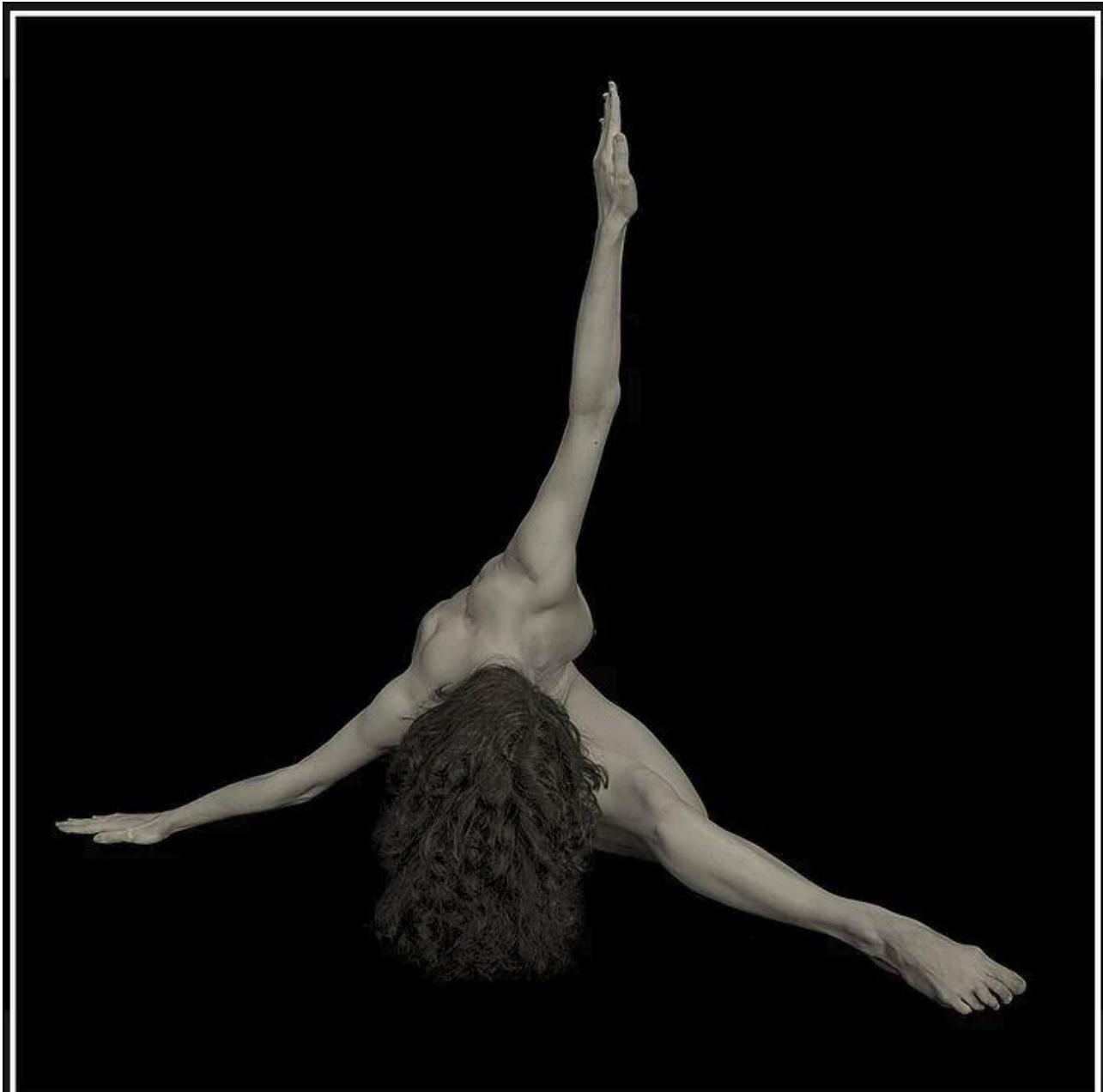
To put things into perspective: I have a wonderful relationship with my wife Annemieke who has been most supportive and loyal to me for more than 27 years...

The second reason is a rather practical one. As we all know, the internet is not a very safe place for photographs. Sometimes, pornographic sites hijack my images and show them on their own sites for some strange reason. In order to protect the personal integrity of my models, it is safer to keep them anonymous, so that no one can hurt them in any way.

In your images, your sense of composed space shows you are formally-trained. Yes?

My city, Arnhem, NL, has an Academy of Arts, ArtEZ, where I first trained as a graphic designer. The design curriculum included photography. I had a very good teacher there who opened up the world of photography to me. The combination of technical skills with creative possibilities fascinated me and gradually I realized that photography had become my passion. The academy had helped me to explore my creativity, now it was time to find the proper tools to use it. Since then I have been working as an autonomous photographer and in the end, this series ODD BODIES became my "magnum opus."





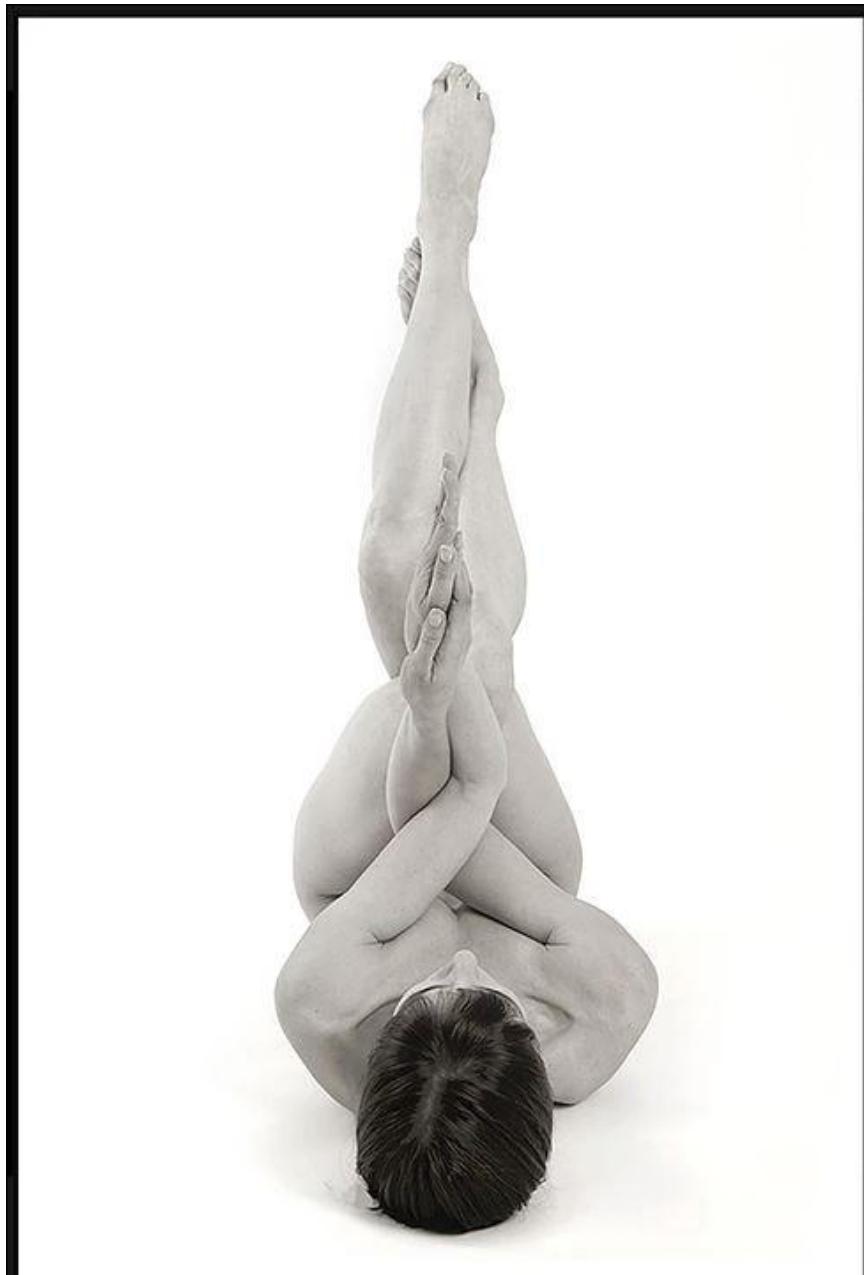
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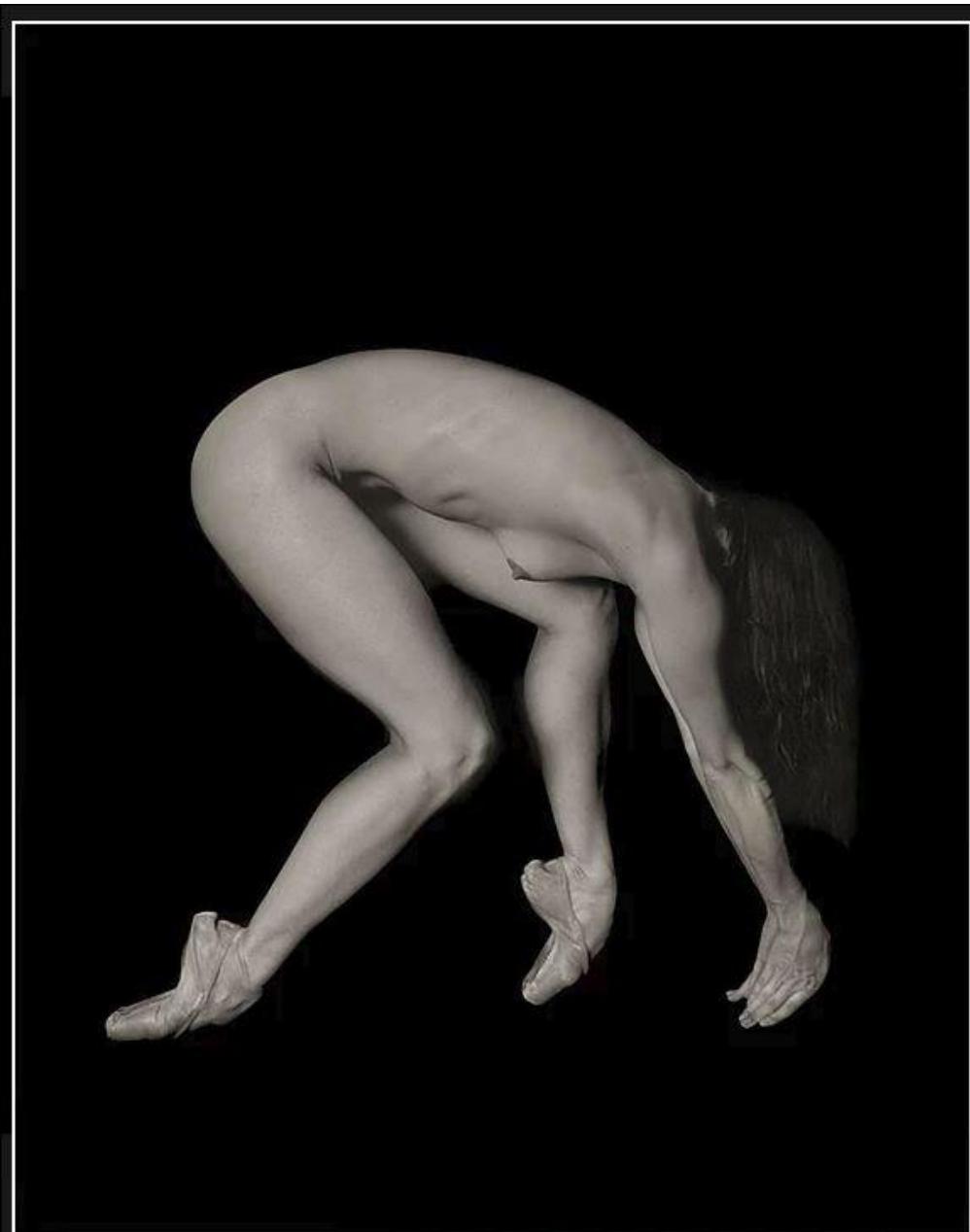
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Artist Interview - Peter van Stralen

You live and work in Arnhem, a city of 150,000. What is the arts environment like there?

There is a thriving art scene in Arnhem. In addition to the graphic arts division in which I trained, ArtEZ has a dance division, an excellent fashion division, a free arts and a 3D industrial design division. Apart from that, ArtEZ also has a conservatory for all kinds of music and a theatre school for young, aspiring actors. My models are mainly dancers from Arnhem schools and companies, though some of them come from Germany, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy.

Your work fits well in the deliberate, "high craft" photographic tradition. Do you teach?

I don't think of myself as a craftsman. There are many, many more photographers who are far more skilled than I am. I have never been an official teacher, though I did teach photography - on a voluntary basis - to unemployed people in order to give them an opportunity to explore their creativity through photography. These classes were part of a governmental project that aimed to offer unemployed people a bit more than just a monthly payment. Sometimes I am also a juror for photo contests, exhibitions, and the like.

You use abstract titles, just letters and numbers.

My photographs have no real titles, just a number for my archive. The reason for this is the fact that I do not wish to lead the spectator towards my own personal view on the image by giving it my title. Instead, I want the viewer to make up his own mind about what **his** title might be. In fact, I do not feel that my images are suitable at all to have a title. Looking at my photographs, I do not think of titles such as "Moon over Paris" or "Arizona Desert Highway." Instead, I think of my whole ODD BODIES series as a kind of sketchbook with hundreds of sketches in it that need no specific titles.

What about your technical systems, equipment, software, methods?

Here is my studio, small and simple. I use a Nikon D3, a 2.8/24-70mm G ED Nikkor lens, and Bowens flash equipment.

I have an iMac and I use Photoshop CC 2018 plus Camera RAW for a little bit of post-production; I use the duotone settings in Photoshop to create a smoother skin tone for the nudes and then I change the image into RGB format.

Apart from that, I do not use any filters, special effects or programs. No frills.



A great mystery, both for makers and viewers of art, is how an artist decides when a piece is done. What factors influence your decisions as you work?

I keep my images quite direct and simple. To me, less usually means more, which makes me a minimalist. As a minimalist, I try to eliminate any superfluous elements from my pictures in order to create a kind of clarity which enables the essence of the image to come forward, just as a sculptor removes any unnecessary parts of the rough stone while at the same time working with his material rather than against it.

Form and composition play a very important role in my work, so I prefer B&W photography. I feel that, in my kind of photography, color only distracts the viewer. "If you take an image of a naked person in color, you get a picture of flesh; if you take an image of a naked person in black and white, you get a picture of forms."

In the ODD BODIES series, I have focused on themes such as alienation and strangeness by photographing the female figure from a different perspective than the more usual classical or erotic nude.

In ODD BODIES, women are no longer familiar and sensual, but rather pleasantly strange and fascinatingly versatile. I want to show the female body in a way that makes you wonder again about seemingly ordinary forms. That is why this photo series is a reflection of my astonishment and admiration for women in general and these dancers in particular.

What artists, past or present, get your attention?

In my teens, I was fascinated by surrealistic painters such as Salvador Dali, Paul Delvaux, and René Magritte. Later on, I discovered Edward Hopper, whom I still admire very much. Sebastiao Salgado is one of my favorites. He is not just a brilliant B&W photographer but also an impressive person with a mind-boggling career. Apart from Salgado, there's Henri Cartier-Bresson and Dutch photographers Erwin Olaf and Anton Corbijn. Music also plays a very important role in my life: From Bach, Mozart and Beethoven to minimalists like Steve Reich, John Adams and Philip Glass. And, yes, German choreographer Pina Bausch is one of my favorites too.

Thank you, Peter. What's in your future, new projects, collaborations, exhibits?

At the moment, there are no specific plans or projects in the pipeline. There is only a chance that I might exhibit my works in Basel, Switzerland, in the year 2020 (!).

You should know that I am a slow worker: some photographers shoot hundreds of photographs in one day, whereas I shoot fewer than 1,000 images in one year. Dutch photographer Paul Huf once said, "Look a little bit more and then you shall have to take a lot less photographs." Nowadays, it is common practice to shoot half a dozen frames or more in one second. People just press the button, hoping that something good will come out of it eventually.

That's not how I like to work. I prefer to look, observe, and not to play Russian Roulette with my camera.



Where can we find more of your work?

You can find more of my works at:

- Homepage: <https://www.petervanstralen.nl/engels>
- Photo Book: "ODD BODIES" <https://www.petervanstralen.nl/engels/nieuws>
- Buy prints: <https://www.petervanstralen.nl/engels/shop/>
- or at: Saatchi Art: <https://www.saatchiart.com/search/user?query=Peter+van+Stralen>



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